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**PAINTED FACES & PRINTED MUSIC:
WOMEN AND MUSIC IN THE PAINTINGS OF
BARTOLOMEO VENETO AND SEBASTIANO
FLORIGERIO**

LAUREN ROSENBLATT

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

PAINTED FACES & PRINTED MUSIC:

WOMEN AND MUSIC IN THE PAINTINGS OF BARTOLOMEO VENETO AND

SEBASTIANO FLORIGERIO

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE

HONORS COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR HONORS IN THE DEGREE OF

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COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

BY

LAUREN ROSENBLATT

ABSTRACT

The cultural story surrounding musical performance by women has changed during the twentieth century. The kind of the prevailing story about women's role in music has changed the structure and kind of ways of representing the story. The story of the female performer's story for performing music has changed only once in the twentieth century and still. These two opposing changes can be seen simultaneously in women's representations and works of this era. Artists' involvement of community-related issues in their work was considered normal and natural, yet other forms of representation as representations of women's activities and roles. Through an analysis of songwriting women's lives and works, *Lady Playing a Game* and

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ABSTRACT

The cultural views surrounding musical performances by women rapidly changed during the sixteenth century. The ideal of the preceding century advised ladies of the court to avoid displaying the frivolous and sinful ways of music-making, but the new notion of the female courtier praised women for performing music, for it could only serve to enhance their beauty and virtue. These two opposing concepts can be seen simultaneously in treatises, correspondences, and artwork of this era. Artists' depictions of courtesans included music to convey what was considered sensual and immoral; yet other works displayed music instruments as representations of women's nobility and grace. Through an analysis of iconography within Bartolomeo Veneto's *Lady Playing a Lute* and Sebastiano Florigerio's *Music Lesson*, this research explores the representation of gender through music in Italian paintings of the sixteenth century.

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INTRODUCTION

Defined roughly as 1330-1530, the Renaissance was a time of rebirth and unprecedented achievement in almost every aspect of culture and society. Intellectuals of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries sought to increase their understanding of multiple subjects through exploration and careful observation. Scientists created art; politicians wrote poetry; priests composed music. This proficiency in multiple fields is emphasized in Erwin Panofsky's comment, "the greatest advances in natural science were made by engineers, instrument-makers, and artists."¹ Many of the Renaissance scholars known to the modern community are admired for this multi-disciplinary scope of knowledge. Men such as Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446), and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) were proficient in many disciplines including painting, metalworking, engineering, sculpting, poetry, and most likely music. While he may be an over-used example, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) encapsulates this broad base of expertise, inventing machines far ahead of his time and creating numerous artistic masterpieces.

Considered part of the liberal arts, music was studied alongside arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, grammar, logic, and rhetoric. The Renaissance saw a fusion of the mechanical and liberal arts; fields of study considered separate disciplines in modern times were not so distant during these centuries.² Musical tempo was widely discussed by musicians, scientists, and medical theorists. In an era preceding the advent of clocks, musical time was thought to be more consistent than the human pulse. Leonardo da Vinci and his contemporaries would often employ the use of musical time to "measure relatively short durations in scientific investigations."³ Brunelleschi's work as both an architect and painter also displays the interrelatedness of the different areas of study. His development of perspective was monumental for the development of art, allowing artists to more accurately recreate the world around them; the study of

¹ Erwin Panofsky, "From Artist, Scientist, Genius: Notes on the Renaissance-Dämmerung," in

² Ibid. p. 131

³ Jane Hatter, "Col tempo: musical time, aging, and sexuality in 16th-century Venetian paintings," *Early Music* (2011), doi: 10.1093/em/caq110

perspective became a mathematical and almost scientific endeavor.⁴ Using his technique, artists were able to paint humans so accurately that medical students studied the works of Giotto to learn anatomy.⁵

Aside from having a broad base of knowledge and significant historical impact, Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, and Galileo were all from Florence. As the geographic center of the Renaissance, many of the artistic, philosophical, and political achievements came from this city. One of the most impactful Florentine scholars was Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), who is widely considered to be the father of humanist thought, some even say of the Renaissance itself. His writings reinvigorated the study of classical authors and emphasized man's journey through life. Collecting ancient Greek and Roman manuscripts, secular scholars followed Petrarch's example and attempted to rediscover schools of thought forgotten during the Middle Ages. As discoveries were made, the men began to emphasize the greatness of the human individual. From the Greek philosopher Protagoras, they borrowed and firmly believed in the motto "Man is the measure of all things," earning them the moniker humanists.

THE CHANGING POLITICAL & ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

During this era, Italy was not one unified nation but independently run city-states with individual cultures and attitudes. Travel and trade between these areas was paramount to the success of the numerous intellectual discoveries, and the Renaissance world was far more connected than one would originally guess. The works of the Venetian geographer, Marin Sanudo (1466-1536) have allowed modern scholars to better understand the travel time for communication and trade between cities. His writings indicate that mail could travel an average of sixty miles per day, with favorable weather and terrain.⁶ Mail from Rome arrived in Venice in less than a week, from London more than three weeks, and Lisbon over a month and a half. These rapid travel times allowed people of different cities to contact once another, share news and, maybe more importantly, recently-made innovations.

⁴ Erwin Panofsky, "From Artist, Scientist, Genius", p. 134

⁵ Ibid, p.142

⁶ Allan W. Atlas, *Renaissance Music: Music in western Europe, 1400-1600* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, Inc., 1998), p. 334

One such innovation that spread quickly was the printing press. With Johannes Gutenberg's (c.1398-1468) moveable type, books were printed and distributed more quickly than ever before seen in Europe, increasing the number of books from thousands to millions.⁷ The two most popular and influential of these in Renaissance Italy were *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) and *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529). *The Prince* has affected leadership and government styles throughout the centuries, influencing the actions of historical figures such as Thomas Cromwell, John Adams, and the Founding Fathers of the United States. Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* provided those in the court with a guide on how to behave and allows the modern reader insight on cultural expectations of the time.

The use of Gutenberg's printing press was crucial to the success of the Protestant movement across Europe. With the aid of printing, Martin Luther's (1483-1546) "95 Theses" of 1517 was quickly distributed across Europe. His excommunication as a result of his public disagreement with the Catholic Church can be seen as the breaking point of a society and power structure that was moving away from the Church. Finally, with King Henry VIII's Act of Supremacy in 1534, England separated from the papacy in favor of secular authority. Other sects of Christianity soon developed, and other countries followed England's lead in separating from the Church. These departures weakened the Vatican's power and financial status as they sponsored wars against nations who left the Church. With one of the founding principles of the Protestant Reformation rooted in the belief that laymen should have the ability to own and read the Bible, this movement would not have been possible without Gutenberg's press and his first printed edition of the Bible. In this way, the spread of texts made possible by Gutenberg fundamentally changed the power dynamics and increased trade in Europe.

While intellectual thoughts spread with the printing press, the far-reaching epidemic of the plague affected the European population, economy, and culture. Conservative estimates are that forty percent of

⁷ Christina J. Moose, *Great Events from History: The Renaissance & early modern era*, vol. 1, 1454 – 1600 (Salem Press, 2005).

the population died from the disease.⁸ In the preceding era, there was a large surplus of laborers. The feudal system capitalized on this; ninety percent of the population did the majority of the work to produce almost all the food,⁹ and they were at the whim of those who owned the land they worked. With the appearance of the plague, populations changed drastically, causing a massive labor shortage. The workers who had previously been overlooked now had agency as they acquired money, land, and mobility. While the decreased population created by the plague allowed many of the serfs to own and work land as they pleased, this change also decreased the demand for food. Farmlands were transformed into fields for pasturing animals, and Europeans began moving to urban areas to find work. The feudal system effectively came to an end in Europe and was replaced by a market-based economy reliant upon trade.

As trade increased, merchants acquired more disposable income and discovered they could be equally profitable settling in one city. With the accumulation of power and wealth, a class made up of merchants and traders arose that replaced the aristocrats and princes as the highest social class. The Medici family is one of the best-known examples of this shift in power. This banking family rose to power quickly within the government of Florence and the Catholic Church. With family members acting as cardinals, popes, and Florentine leaders, the Medicis were in control of the Vatican and Florence for many years and were said to have been the wealthiest family in Europe.

ART IN THE RENAISSANCE

In a time when princes and city-states vied constantly power, art was used as a display of wealth.¹⁰ After returning from exile, the Medicis commissioned art as a way to demonstrate their authority. Making money for money's sake was frowned upon, so merchants and tax collectors would sponsor artistic projects to gain favor with God or to avoid paying taxes.¹¹

Commissioned works of art, whether generated by the state, the Church, monastic communities, civic and corporate groups such as guilds, or private individuals, were conceived with specific

⁸ Christina J. Moose, *Great Events from History*, p.38

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Richard Mackenney, *Renaissances: the cultures of Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 80

¹¹ Ibid, p. 112

goals in mind and were meant to convey publicly specific messages often more complex than their subjects would indicate.¹²

As the Renaissance began to emphasize the individual, portraiture became more popular and was commissioned to serve as a visual genealogical history, a display of wealth, or purely aesthetic purposes. The visual arts became an integral part of the flowering Renaissance culture as the growing middle class collected and commissioned art for its aesthetic value.

These commissions were not simple affairs. Agreements between the patron and artist were incredibly formal. Commissions were documented in contracts that stipulated almost every aspect of the project. The subject, colors, materials, and timeline were all specified within this document, accompanied by penalties that would be incurred if requirements were not met. Sketches created beforehand were even included and could be legally binding.¹³ This structured system took aspects of artistic freedom from the painter, but it also created a collaborative relationship between patron and artist. This collaboration continued into the creation of the work as well. Unless the contracts stated otherwise, the main artist designed and oversaw projects while their apprentices and assistants may have done the majority of the work.¹⁴ There was little issue with stylistic discrepancies between painters since the apprentices worked under their master until they could perfectly imitate their master's works.¹⁵ It was only after perfecting this style that they could leave the workshop and begin experimenting with their own style, usually at the age of twenty.

With the renewed interest in classical studies, artists began depicting mythological scenes, and it was not long before popes and bishops were commissioning subjects which would have been deemed heretical just a few years before. New developments of perspective and shading allowed for more accurate representations of life and the expression of human feeling. By pivoting the subject to face the viewer, painters were better able to manipulate facial expressions and convey emotion. These artistic

¹² John T. Paoletti, Gary M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1997), p

16

¹³ Ibid, p. 25

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 21

¹⁵ Richard Stemp, *The Secret Language of the Renaissance*, (London: Duncan Baird Publishers Ltd, 2006), p. 18

trends continued to influence artists for generations, culminating in the highly emotional and dynamic works of Baroque artists, such as Caravaggio (1571-1610).

There were also different developments based on geographic regions. While Florence was fascinated with line and Brunelleschi's development of perspective, northern artists were more concerned with color. Because of their geographic position, Venice had access to many traded goods, and they became the center of the pigment trade. Venetian paintings began to explode with color as new pigments entered from Eastern regions.¹⁶ The city was also a hub of artistic activity. Artists such as Perugino (c.1450-1523), Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), Leonardo da Vinci, and other Lombardesque painters and sculptors thrived in Venice.¹⁷

MUSIC IN THE RENAISSANCE

Music benefitted from the new class of patrons just as art did. From the diaries, academic records, and other such written texts that have been passed down to us, we can tell that musicians were in high demand. For centuries preceding the Renaissance, vocal music developed almost entirely within the Catholic Church, especially since music was incorporated into daily services. The church's influence over music development is apparent in their sponsorship and protection of the Benedictine monk Guido of Arezzo (991-1050). His creation of the four-line staff and syllabic representations of pitches, *ut, re, mi, fa, sol, and la*, were crucial to the development of music. Once music could be written, monks and priests were some of the few people who could read and write musical notation. The congregation did not participate in the services, so they had no need for hymnals or musical notation. Music within the Church was relatively utilitarian in nature; it served to glorify God through musical settings of the religious texts, and music notation was used as a simple and crude mnemonic device to help choristers remember their memorized music. As music notation developed into a more refined and specific technique, compositions became increasingly complex, and the clergy felt as if the music was taking precedence over the words of God. In response to this, and partially in response to the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent

¹⁶ Richard Stemp, *The Secret Language of the Renaissance*, p. 44

¹⁷ Laura Pagnotta, *Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*, (Seattle: Putnam Foundation, 2002), p. 4

(1545-1563) was convened. It was here that many changes were made to the services and doctrine, including pressure on composers to emphasize clarity of text over the musical complexity. While complex music was no longer accepted in the Church, composers continued to explore musical notation in secular music.

Because the monks knew musical notation, the large majority of early secular music was not notated, and there are comparatively few surviving records of this music. In the late medieval and Renaissance eras, however, the records of secular music drastically increased. The increased court patronage, the ability to print music, the rise of the middle and upper class, the improvements in instrument designs, and the arrival of humanistic thought all assisted in the increase of secular music.¹⁸ Artists and musicians began to receive commissions for non-sacred works, and for the first time in recorded history, secular music flourished.

As music became available to those outside the Church, it began to play a larger role in society and court. Castiglione's writings show that all respectable gentlemen should be able to play music, and it is clear that the primary function of secular music was to bring people together and encourage socialization. They were expected to make music for the purpose of passing time and pleasing women.¹⁹ This can be seen when Castiglione states, "music is especially pleasant in the presence of ladies whose tender and delicate spirits are readily penetrated with harmony and filled with sweetness."²⁰ It was used not only to display their refinement, but also to woo women and work with others from the court in harmony.

While the increased wealth of bankers and merchants allowed them to patronize music; they would have been unable to participate in music-making without the adaptation of musical notation for the printing press. In 1501, Ottaviano dei Petrucci (1466-1539) published *Harmonice musices odhecaton A*,

¹⁸ Iain Fenlon, "Music in Italian Renaissance Painting," in *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music*, edited by Tess Knighton, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), p. 197

¹⁹ Jane Hatter, "Col tempo"

²⁰ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 2003)

the first collection of printed polyphonic works. By 1530, Petrucci had multiple competitors. Centered in Venice, the printing industry began publishing numerous musical manuscripts for affordable prices.

For example, in 1481, the court of Ferrara paid ten ducats for a 116-folio parchment manuscript that displayed the duke's illuminated coat of arms and seventy-seven gold initials, but was seen by no one outside the twenty-nine singers of the ducal chapel; in 1513, Ferdinand Columbus . . . was one of hundreds who purchased Petrucci's smaller *Motteti A* (1502) for little more than half a ducat.²¹

Now that collections of music were available and affordable to the middle class, it became a way to pass their free time. Music-making began to act as a status-symbol in the Italian courts, symbolizing learning and refinement.

The academic study of music by humanists increased as secular performances increased. While there were ancient writings, plays, and sculptures that survived into the Renaissance, there was no surviving evidence of music notation. Humanists set out to rediscover and recreate ancient music based on their ideas of how classical music might have sounded. One of the art forms that came from these inquiries was opera. In their new musical developments, these scholars continued to emphasize the themes that were so common in other studies and discourses. "The wealth of new musical means was born from the overwhelming desire to express and paint in tones the other world of nature and the inner reality of man."²²

Over the centuries, music has been viewed as sinful in some contexts and virtuous in others. The belief that music can incite emotional reactions goes back to the ancient Greeks who believed certain harmonies played by specific instruments had the ability to alleviate some mental states,²³ and the soul would become closer to heaven if in harmony with music.²⁴ In the Renaissance and medieval eras, angels were portrayed holding and performing instruments;²⁵ yet, the Church simultaneously viewed music as

²¹ Allan W. Atlas, *Renaissance Music*, p. 261

²² Edward E. Lowinsky, "Music in the culture of the Renaissance," in *Music in the culture of the Renaissance and other Essays*, 19-40. Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1989. p.38

²³ Albert Ausoni, *Music in Art*, (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2009), p. 122

²⁴ Bert Meijer, "Harmony and Satire in the Works of Niccolò Frangipane: Problems in the Depiction of Music," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* vol 6, no.2 (1972-1973), p. 97

²⁵ Albert Ausoni, *Music in Art*, p. 139

sinful because listeners gave over to their senses. Similarly, Plato viewed music "as one of the principal agents of uncontrollable sexual desire."²⁶ Some were also against music for its creative nature; they felt music created something out of nothing, which they believed only God should have the ability to do.²⁷ In art, this viewpoint can be seen as demonic sounds tempting saints and martyrs.

We find the immense enthusiasm for music at all levels of Renaissance society matched by an intense fear and violent condemnation of the seductive power of the ethereal art. Hieronymus Bosch placed musicians, musical instruments, and choirbooks in the inferno in several of his hell paintings. In one of them musicians are placed in the immediate company of gamblers.²⁸ [Figure 1]

In art, the simultaneous condemnation and praise of music common to Renaissance culture can be seen.

RENAISSANCE WOMEN

The views on women and their expected behavior are equally contradictory. While the greatness of the individual was praised during the Renaissance, the admiration was confined to men. Viewed as property, women were defined by their relationship to a man.²⁹ They were to be silent and subservient.³⁰ Practice, however, may have been different. It is difficult to determine a standard of acceptable behavior applicable to all sixteenth-century women from the disparate writings on this topic, but there were some who disagreed with the traditional view of women. Debates over women's situation took place in the sixteenth century, with Italian writing taking the lead in broadening women's roles.³¹ From these dialogues, four different views on women arise. "Some thought woman at best a necessary evil, some admitted her good in a limited and humble way but of inferior value compared to men, some took her as good and necessary equally with men, and some claimed superiority for her over men".³² Although

²⁶ Albert Ausoni, *Music in Art*, p. 51

²⁷ Richard Mackenney, *Renaissances: the cultures of Italy*, p. 182

²⁸ Edward E. Lowinsky, "Music in the culture of the Renaissance," p.27

²⁹ Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. viii

³⁰ Stefano Lorenzetti, "Public behavior, music and the construction of feminine identity in the Italian Renaissance," *Recercare* vol 23, no. 1/2 (2011), p. 9

³¹ Anthony Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians? Professional Women Musicians in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *Women Making Music*, edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 90

³² Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, p. 10

women may have gained agency in scholarly writing, little changed in practice, and the situation of Renaissance women was similar to that of medieval women.³³

One area in which women gained substantial freedom was in the field of music. The traditional view of female music-making restricted both the instruments and the performance style available for women's use. When it was considered acceptable to perform, they could do so only when requested or urged by a man.³⁴ This ideal of feminine music limited women to utilizing only the softer and gentler instruments such as lutes, violas, or the voice;³⁵ percussive and loud instruments were certainly not available for their use,³⁶ and if music-making was too loud, energetic, or unrequested, the woman performing was considered sinful.

Female music-making can be seen to shift from "an expression of the generalized ideal of the young woman courtier . . . To the more specialized role of the woman

musician who was expected only to perform and not to be at least an out-of-balance reflection of the complete courtier."³⁷ Physical beauty was highly valued in the Renaissance. The notion that women should serve as inspiration to music can be traced back to Plato who believed the Muses kept the celestial bodies in motion with their singing.³⁸ In 1610, Tommaso Campanella even says only women should



FIGURE 1: HIERONYMUS BOSCH *THE GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS* c.1495-1505 MUSEO DEL PRADO, MADRID

³³ Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, p. 2

³⁴ Stefano Lorenzetti, "Public behavior, music and the construction of feminine identity," p. 13

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14

³⁶ Howard Brown, Louise K. Stein, *Music in the Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), p. 87

³⁷ Anthony Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians?," p. 94

³⁸ Albert Ausoni, *Music in Art*, p. 10

perform music because they are more pleasing to men.³⁹ The arrival of professional actresses in *commedia dell'arte* during the 1560s and 1570s made way for professional female musicians.⁴⁰ This change is evident in the lives of a few women during the sixteenth century. Gaspara Stampa (c.1523-1554) was not married and did not act as a courtesan, but she was viewed highly and socialized with high circles. Either she or her mother created a popular *accademia* with musicians participating, showing that music, or the organization of musical activities at least, could be a respectable position for a women. Polissena Pecorina lived in Venice in the 1530-1570s, socialized with well-known composers, such as Adrien Willaert (c.1490-1562) and Piero Strozzi (1551-1614), and was praised for her musical ability with the lute and voice.⁴¹ Another well-respected Venetian musician was Madalena Casulana. During the 1560s-1590s, she composed many works and had them published in anthologies and collections.⁴² While these women provide examples of women's expanding freedom in musical expression, there were many who still felt female music-making was sinful in a number of ways.

More women began to receive an education, but instructing women in the ways of music-making was still controversial.⁴³ Music, beauty, and love were often viewed as being connected, and all three of these were viewed as being virtuous in some situations and sinful in others. Women making music embodied all three of these and could be representative of virtuous beauty worth striving for or tempting beauty that should be avoided. If women were associated with these ideas, it is not surprising that those who consider music to be sinful, beauty to be dangerous, and love to be tempting saw female music-making as sinful. In his treaty, Piccolomini states "a woman's every virtue has at its end the pursuit of love," and this could prove dangerous.⁴⁴

In the treatises that are harshly opposed to women, singing is only a moment of extreme corruption of an already corrupt being, which not only "causes young men to fall, but also those who have already placed a foot in the dark ditch." The strict division between these two dimensions is the necessary condition for legitimating both woman and her music, joined together

³⁹ Stefano Lorenzetti, "Public behavior, music and the construction of feminine identity," p. 11

⁴⁰ Anthony Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians?," p. 102

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 105

⁴² Ibid, p. 106

⁴³ Stefano Lorenzetti, "Public behavior, music and the construction of feminine identity," p. 20

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 14

in a performance that does not simply present love by means of words, but by an act that potentially invokes a public response. Performance of music by women is a 'political' instrument of love that modifies the social context . . . it brings about a change of behaviour, a change of perspective, a change of perception, that temporarily redefines relations between the sexes.⁴⁵

A compelling example of this clash of views on female music-making can be seen in Duke Alfonso d'Este's visit to Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga in Mantua. Bringing his highly praised group of singing women, Duke Alfonso held a performance for his host. Unfortunately Duke Guglielmo was quite angered and insulted at the presentation.⁴⁶

The changes brought about by trade, mechanical innovations, cultural shifts, and opposing viewpoints are reflected in the artworks of the time. I will explore the synthesis of historical, artistic, musical, and societal developments that led to the depiction of women and their music performance in Bartolomeo Veneto's *Lady Playing a Lute* and Sebastiano Fiorigero's *Music Lesson*. Through a comprehension of historical trends, musical practices, the lifestyle and representation of courtesans, and symbolic language, I will attempt to view these works as a Renaissance individual would have perceived them and understand how they reflect women's place in society and music performance.

⁴⁵ Stefano Lorenzetti, "Public behavior, music and the construction of feminine identity," p. 20

⁴⁶ Anthony Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians?," p. 92

BACKGROUND

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Both *Lady Playing a Lute* [Figure 2] and *Music Lesson* [Figure 3] have contested interpretations and have been referenced by many names throughout the years. *Music Lesson* has been previously referenced by the titles *Musical Entertainment*, *Concert with Nine Figures*, *Singing Group*, and *Musical Scene*. The main issue surrounding these pieces is the interpretation of the female subject in both works. Remigo Marini interpreted *Music Lesson* as a family setting, such as the ones seen in the later Baroque and Classical eras. Jane Hatter approached *Music Lesson* differently with her connection of time, tempo, and aging in “*Col tempo*: musical time, aging, and sexuality in 16th century Venetian paintings.”⁴⁷ By using the symbolism of musical conventions, she supported her claim that the piece presents an unchaste scene and even suggests it may have an element of judgment and forewarning. Bert Meijer supported this interpretation by suggesting the text on the woman’s dress is indicative of her promiscuous nature.⁴⁸ Meijer explained how its translation might have been misinterpreted to support the theory that she was a virtuous woman.

Similarly, scholars disagree as to the character of the subject in *Lady Playing a Lute*. Iain Fenlon stated that despite the subject’s modest dress, she is a courtesan.⁴⁹ H. Colin Slim, meanwhile, stated that her dress exempts her from being a courtesan. Slim’s previous work in the field of



FIGURE 2: BARTOLOMEO VENETO *LADY PLAYING A LUTE* C.1520 ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM, BOSTON

⁴⁷ Jane Hatter, “*Col tempo*”

⁴⁸ Bert Meijer, “Harmony and Satire in the Works of Niccolò Frangipane”

⁴⁹ Iain Fenlon, “Music in Italian Renaissance Painting”

musical iconography and his studies of *Lady Playing a Lute* and *Music Lesson* provided insights into both pieces and their cultural underpinnings. He analyzed the symbolism of music in these paintings and many others in his articles such as “The Prodigal Son at the Whores’ Music, Art, and Drama,”⁵⁰ “The Lutenist’s Hand,”⁵¹ and “Two Paintings of ‘Concert Scenes’ from the Veneto and the Morgan Library’s Unique Music Print of 1520.”⁵² These articles and many others are gathered in *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century*; his introduction to this collection presents a look into the field of music iconography and its accompanying difficulties.⁵³ Finally, Laura Pagnotta’s texts on Bartolomeo Veneto and his portraits are some of the few, if not only, major sources for the study of this artist’s life. My lack of Italian



FIGURE 3: SEBASTIANO FLORIGERIO *MUSIC LESSON* 1525 ALTE PINAKOTHEK, MUNICH

⁵⁰ H. Colin Slim, “The Prodigal Son at the Whores’ Music, Art, and Drama,” in *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century: Essays in Iconography*, edited by H. Colin Slim, (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002)

⁵¹ H. Colin Slim, “The Lutenist’s Hand,” in *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century: Essays in Iconography*, edited by H. Colin Slim, (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002)

⁵² H. Colin Slim, “Two Paintings of ‘Concert Scenes’ from the Veneto and the Morgan Library’s Unique Music Print of 1520,” in *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century: Essays in Iconography*, edited by H. Colin Slim, (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002)

⁵³ H. Colin Slim, “Introduction: Some Thoughts on Musical Inscriptions,” in *Painting Music in the Sixteenth Century: Essays in Iconography*, edited by H. Colin Slim, (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002)

comprehension unfortunately excluded the use of her not yet translated text *Bartolomeo Veneto: l'opera complete*, but there was much to be learned from her work *Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*,⁵⁴ which described not only his portraiture but also gave an overview of his life.

Translations of Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* were especially helpful in understanding the place gender roles and music held in society. Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* can reveal much biographical information on Renaissance artists' lifestyles and the business of art. The works of both writers must be read with scrutiny, however. Vasari is known for his inflated and adulatory descriptions of artists, and Castiglione's text describes ideal court life and is not necessarily a realistic representation. The wide scope of this subject required texts from many disciplines, and there were a number of sources that helped me gain an understanding of the cultural context and imagery. Albert Ausoni's *Music in Art* offered a thorough exploration of music's representation in the arts throughout history.⁵⁵ By presenting a picture of each piece accompanied by a concise and detailed overview of the work, this resource placed music iconography within its historical perspective. Similarly John Paoletti's *Art in Renaissance Italy* allowed me to gain an understanding of artistic trends during this time.⁵⁶ As for music history, Howard Brown's *Music in the Renaissance*⁵⁷ and Allan Atlas' *Renaissance Music*⁵⁸ both present an organized and detailed overview of Renaissance music.

Ruth Kelso's *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*⁵⁹ and Georgina Masson's *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*⁶⁰ present the lifestyles of women and courtesans during this time. Both provide a number of quotes from primary sources, giving more depth and insight into the subject they were exploring. Ruth Kelso explains women's position in society and how expectations of women changed rapidly in the sixteenth century. Georgina Masson's *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance* presented

⁵⁴ Laura Pagnotta, *Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*

⁵⁵ Albert Ausoni, *Music in Art*

⁵⁶ John T. Paoletti, Gary M. Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy*

⁵⁷ Howard Brown, Louise K. Stein, *Music in the Renaissance*

⁵⁸ Allan W. Atlas, *Renaissance Music: Music in western Europe, 1400-1600*

⁵⁹ Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*

⁶⁰ Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1975)

detailed descriptions of the lives of courtesans. Through primary accounts, she shed light on the nuances and daily lifestyle of courtesans. Anthony Newcomb's "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians? Professional Women Musicians in Sixteenth-Century Italy"⁶¹ also gave a thorough overview and explanation of primary sources that reflect women's position in terms of music and the conflicting views surrounding female music performance. Patricia Egan's research into Renaissance concert scenes explores common musical settings and their meaning in art.⁶² Bert Meijer also explored the representation of concert scenes, particularly how they relate to beauty and emotion.⁶³

THE ARTISTS

There seemed to be no biographical sources concerning Sebastiano Florigerio, and there is little written on the life of Bartolomeo Veneto. H. Colin Slim dates Bartolomeo Veneto ca.1480-1531.⁶⁴ From a scroll he painted in his *Madonna and Child* we learn that he is half Venetian and half Cremonese. His signature was most often "Bartolomeo" followed by Venetus, da Venetia, or da Venecia. This signals not only his place of origin but also his affiliation with the Venetian school of painting.⁶⁵ His diverse array of clients in the Veneto, Emilia, and Lombardy regions of the Po Valley allowed him to travel frequently, coming into contact with various regional artistic styles.⁶⁶ In 1502, he signs the first piece of work that has survived to present times. From the understanding of artistic workshops, we know that he was at least twenty when he signed this piece.⁶⁷ Employed by Cardinal Ippolito d'Este (1479-1520), he most likely moved when the cardinal did so. In 1511, Bartolomeo Veneto was documented in Milan and possibly lived there intermittently until the Cardinal's death in 1520.⁶⁸ After the first painting he signed, he can be

⁶¹ Anthony Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians?"

⁶² Patricia Egan, "Concert scenes in musical paintings of the Italian Renaissance," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* vol 14, no. 2 (1961)

⁶³ Bert Meijer, "Harmony and Satire in the Works of Niccolò Frangipane"

⁶⁴ H. Colin Slim, "Multiple Images of Bartolomeo Veneto's Lute-Playing Woman (1520)," in *Music in Renaissance Cities and Courts: Studies in honor of Lewis Lockwood*, edited by Jessie Ann Owens and Anthony M. Cummings, (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1997), p. 405

⁶⁵ Laura Pagnotta, *Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*, p. 11

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 11

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 18

seen in the documentation of Ferrara's ducal registers,⁶⁹ but it is now believed that it is in reference to a different Bartolomeo, since the person notated is there before Bartolomeo was born.⁷⁰ Additionally, his *Portrait of Beatrice d'Este* is said to support the notion that he was in Ferrara at some point; however Beatrice d'Este married Ludovico Sforza and resided in Milan. Additionally, this painting is dated c.1500 and Beatrice d'Este died in 1497.

Bartolomeo's work shows influences from northern styles. His anticlassical tendencies such as his treatment of drapery shows his connection to Northern artists such as Lorenzo Lotto (c.1480-1556), Marco Basaiti (1496-1530) and Benedetto Diana (c.1460-1525). His landscapes connect him to the Flemish style of painting, and he combined "the naturalism and palette of Flemish painting with an Italian sense of space and form."⁷¹

Ideas of Venetian origin, whether from Giorgione, Bellini, or Antonello, references to Northern culture influences of Leonardo and Boltraffio, and hints of Lotto all merge in a reconciliation of tense yet controlled expressivity. This ability to synthesize ideas is carried out on a formal level through Bartolomeo's use of an extremely limpid and crystalline atmosphere that allows him to bring out every detail. His neat, precise craftsmanship naturalistically defines features in a way that emphasizes the contour of the figures. Intense and often contrasting colors are another element of this synthesis.⁷²

The use of vivid colors common to Venice is typical of his style, but he also displays many characteristics from other areas.

He is most well-known for his *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress* [Figure 4], which embodies his style in many ways. Bartolomeo Veneto specialized in portraiture early on, and more often than not, he would paint his subjects with a landscape background.⁷³ The subject in *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress* is dressed in rich fabrics and posed in front of rich drapery. Within his portraits he often placed buildings and monuments from real life, most likely at the request of his patron to show their

⁶⁹ Andrea de Hevesy, "Some portraits of the Borgias-Lucrezia," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* vol 61, no.352 (1932), p. 26

⁷⁰ Laura Pagnotta, *Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*, p. 16

⁷¹ Ibid p. 3

⁷² Ibid, p. 23

⁷³ Ibid, p. 17

hometown.⁷⁴ He often rounded the face and neck into ovals and geometric shapes.⁷⁵ Although the following quote discusses Bartolomeo Veneto's portraits, *Portrait of a Gentleman* and *Portrait of a Lady*, the description Pagnotta provides is equally applicable to *Lady Playing a Lute*.

Both paintings present a careful contrast between the slight three-quarter position of the head and the frontal alignment of the bust; a tight, neat execution of the face; a clear light that brings out all the details; and a depiction of the subjects steady, serene self-awareness. These elements are set against the background of the search for formal and expressive balance that formed part of the Venetian, as well as Central Italian, cultivation of classicism of the early cinquecento.⁷⁶

This emotional intensity and clarity he is able to convey is characteristic of his works.

THE PAINTINGS

Bartolomeo Veneto's *Lady Playing a Lute* is simultaneously typical and atypical of his style. The expressivity of the eyes and the cylindrical nature of the woman's face are characteristics of his portraits,



FIGURE 4: BARTOLOMEO VENETO *Portrait of a Lady in a Green Dress* c.1480-1531
TIMKEN MUSEUM OF ART, SAN DIEGO



FIGURE 5: BARTOLOMEO VENETO *CARTELLINO*
FROM *LADY PLAYING A LUTE* c.1520
ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM,
BOSTON

⁷⁴ Laura Pagnotta, *Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*, p. 12

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 17

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 18

as is her vibrant green dress and the detailed drapery. His influences from Northern artistic trends are evident in the way the illuminated woman stands out from the dark background. From the cartellino at the bottom of the painting we know that it is dated at 1520 [Figure 5]. Aside from the date, the history of this piece is not entirely clear. There are at least 23 copies of this piece, none of which are signed by Bartolomeo Veneto. While all of the 23 replicas are fundamentally the same artwork, there are notable variations between them. Seven replicas have wheels instead of lutes.⁷⁷ As many as fourteen replicas had halos added to the painting after they were originally created.⁷⁸ And the music differs in every replica. All of these variations can be interpreted in a number of ways and indicate a multiplicity of meanings.⁷⁹ This painting has been referenced by many different titles, and Bartolomeo Veneto's name is spelled a number of different ways. The title I have chosen is the one I found most often. As for the artist's name, I will be using the spelling that Laura Pagnotta uses in her numerous writings about him and his works.

The lack of signatures is uncharacteristic of his work.⁸⁰ For this reason, *Lady Playing a Lute* has previously been incorrectly attributed to Ambrogia de Predis, Marco d'Oggiono, Bermardino Luini, and most notably, Leonardo da Vinci.⁸¹ The face of the woman is "similar to Leonardo's models for *Leda*, *La Scapigliata* [Figure 6], and *Virgin on the Rocks*,⁸² which led scholars to believe the piece was Leonardo's work. Additionally Codex Atlanticus folio 13v-b⁸³ contains Leonardo's only sketch of a musical instrument [Figure 7]. In it, a hand holds a lute in a position similar to the woman in *Lady Playing a Lute*.⁸⁴ It is also worth noting that *Lady Playing a Lute* is the only known painting that includes a similar hand position.⁸⁵ Based on these similarities, Slim suggests the work is based on a now unknown

406 ⁷⁷ H. Colin Slim, "Multiple Images of Bartolomeo Veneto's Lute-Playing Woman (1520)," p.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 418

⁷⁹ H. Colin Slim, "The Lutenist's Hand," p. 34

⁸⁰ H. Colin Slim, "Multiple Images of Bartolomeo Veneto's Lute-Playing Woman," p. 406

⁸¹ H. Colin Slim, "The Lutenist's Hand," p. 33

⁸² Laura Pagnotta, *Portraits of Bartolomeo Veneto*, p. 26

⁸³ H. Colin Slim, "The Lutenist's Hand," p. 32

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.32

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 33

prototype, possibly by Leonardo da Vinci.⁸⁶ Creating copies of a popular painting would not have been an uncommon prospect for this time. Famous paintings would often be copied and distributed by pupils of the artists or other contemporaries, making it difficult to identify the original work.⁸⁷ If *Lady Playing a Lute* was created as an imitation of a better-known piece, the variations between copies would be logical, as would the similarities in hand positions.⁸⁸

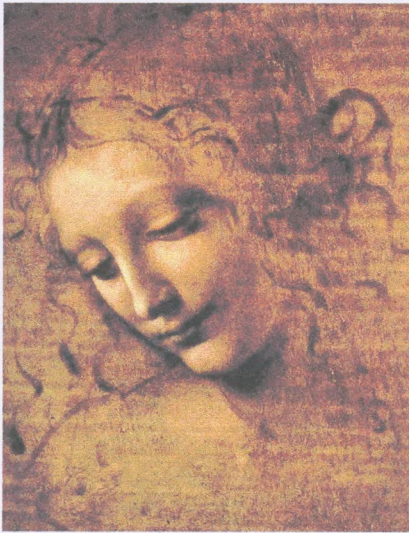


FIGURE 6: LEONARDO DA VINCI *LA SCAPIGLIATA* C.1508 GALLERIA NAZIONALE DI PARMA, ITALY

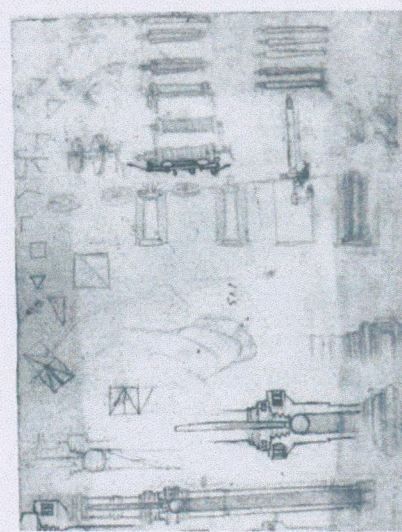


FIGURE 7: LEONARDO DA VINCI *SHEET OF ARTILLERY STUDIES* C.1485-1490 CA, F. 13 V-B

ANALYSIS

CONCERT SCENES & AGING

As music became more prevalent in households, the depictions of concert scenes increased.⁸⁹ These scenes usually portray three or more performers arranged around one central figure and are surrounded by music manuscripts and instruments.⁹⁰ While these depictions are referred to as concert scenes, it is worth mentioning that the term concert would have been employed in a different way than a

⁸⁶ H. Colin Slim, "The Lutenist's Hand," p. 34

⁸⁷ H. Colin Slim, "Multiple Images of Bartolommeo Veneto's Lute-Playing Woman," p. 406

⁸⁸ H. Colin Slim, "The Lutenist's Hand," p. 33

⁸⁹ Bert Meijer, "Harmony and Satire in the Works of Niccolò Frangipane," p. 96

⁹⁰ Patricia Egan, "Concert scenes in musical paintings of the Italian Renaissance," p. 189

modern audience is familiar with.⁹¹ For one, there were no spaces devoted solely to music performances in the Renaissance. Music was instead performed in courtyards, *accademies*, and homes.⁹² These private settings are clear from works such as Lorenzo Costa's *Concert* and the Master of the Female Half-Lengths' *Concert of Women* [Figure 8]. These paintings also show the norm of depicting musicians in half or three-quarter length,⁹³ with their lower body blocked by a balustrade, sill, or table.

Around these musical figures, a modern viewer might expect to see an audience, but the presence of listeners is inconsequential in the depiction of a concert scene. Even when listeners are present, they often are not attentive to the music. Renaissance audiences were rarely silent, using musical performances as an opportunity to gossip, network, and climb the social ladder. Their audience's apparent apathy hardly seems to be a deterrent to the musicians though, since they appear either to play for their enjoyment or to be so engrossed in the music that they are unaware of the audience.⁹⁴ In the Renaissance there was no clear delineation between performers and audience-members until the end of the era. Since most well-refined individuals knew how to perform music, it was not uncommon for listeners to join in the performance.⁹⁵

It was not considered acceptable for all those who could join to do so though. There was a notion that music served different functions at different stages of life, and the ability of the listener to participate may have been determined by age. After a certain point, music performance by both genders became uncouth. Baldassare Castiglione states this clearly in his writings outlining proper behavior for courtiers when he says, "it is indeed unbecoming and

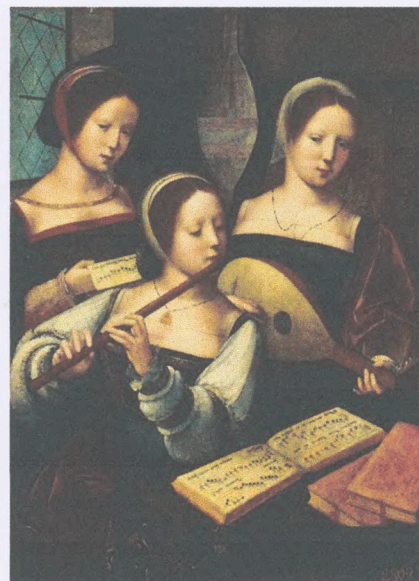


FIGURE 8: MASTER OF THE FEMALE HALF-LENGTHS' *CONCERT OF WOMEN* 1520-1525 THE HERMITAGE, ST. PETERSBURG

⁹¹ Patricia Egan, "Concert scenes in musical paintings of the Italian Renaissance," p. 184

⁹² Bert Meijer, "Harmony and Satire in the Works of Niccolò Frangipane," p. 96

⁹³ Ibid p. 189

⁹⁴ Ibid p. 185

⁹⁵ Anthony Newcomb, "Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians?," p. 97

most unsightly for a man of any station, who is old, grey, toothless, and wrinkled to be seen lute in hand, playing and singing in a company of ladies, even though he may do this tolerably well.”⁹⁶ Women were believed to age more quickly than men, and they were expected to become silent as they grew older, both musically and socially.⁹⁷ “Though age diminished the degree to which a man could enthusiastically engage in music and sex, a woman was grotesque if she failed to age into silence.”⁹⁸ There was also the traditional view that women should not make music even when younger. Female silence can be seen in Bartolomeo Veneto’s *Lady Playing a Lute*. The woman seems poised to create music, but she would not be able to perform positioned as she is [Figure 9]. Since the relationship between her wrist, fingers, hand, and arm is anatomically incorrect, her hands are in a place that would severely inhibit the ability to play the lute she is holding.⁹⁹ The woman’s silence may be an attempt to present virtue, but it may instead show a lack of understanding on the part of the original artist. Viewing this as an error would be even more plausible if the work is a copy of a prototype.

Sebastiano Florigerio’s *Music Lesson* also displays female silence. Knowing the Renaissance views of music in old age, it is appropriate that the older woman in *Music Lesson* is silencing herself by covering her mouth. Additionally, the young woman in the center of the music-making does not seem to participate in the activity. Jane Hatter suggests that *Music Lesson* represents an intersection of past and present. In this theory, the lower figures are seen as the younger counterparts to those positioned behind them. The older and wiser individuals looking at their younger counterparts may now be attempting to share warnings against the sins of flirtatious music-making.



FIGURE 9: BARTOLOMEO VENETO *LADY PLAYING A LUTE* C.1520 ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM, BOSTON

⁹⁶ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*

⁹⁷ Jane Hatter, “Col tempo: musical time, aging, and sexuality”

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ H. Colin Slim, “The Lutenist’s Hand,” p. 34

LUTES

The lute can also be read as an indication of sin or virtue. The lute is one of the most commonly depicted instruments in the Renaissance, and its popularity was increased by the widespread propagation of frottolas, madrigals, and solo lute pieces. This can be seen in the “dozens of lute books . . . published, containing dances and ricercars, fantasies, and variations, as well as intabulations of vocal music”.¹⁰⁰ In secular settings, lutes are depicted in a variety of situations; they can be seen in concert scenes, in portraits, and allegorical scenes. In sacred art, these instruments were placed in works containing heavenly angels and saints. Mary Magdalene was so often portrayed with a certain type of lute, known as the pear lute, that some artists would not portray other subjects with this instrument [Figure 10].¹⁰¹ Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music, was also depicted as a female lutenist;¹⁰² for this reason, Iain Fenlon



FIGURE 10: MASTER OF THE FEMALE
HALF-LENGTHS MARY
MAGDALENE PLAYING THE LUTE



FIGURE 11: MASTER OF THE SAINT
BARTHOLOMEW ALTARPIECE 1505-
1510 NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

and others have said that the lute indicates the woman in *Lady Playing a Lute* is Saint Cecilia.¹⁰³ This theory can be supported by the halos that were added to fourteen of the twenty-three replicas.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ *The Harper Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed, s.v. “Lute”

¹⁰¹ H. Colin Slim, “Multiple Images of Bartolommeo Veneto’s Lute-Playing Woman,” p. 60

¹⁰² H. Colin Slim, “The Lutenist’s Hand,” p. 33

¹⁰³ Iain Fenlon, “Music in Italian Renaissance Painting,” p. 194

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 194

Interpreting the woman as Saint Cecilia has a few discrepancies, however. It is possible that this was not an attempt to flatter the music-maker but the music instead. Saint Cecilia is also most often depicted with a portative organ instead of a lute,¹⁰⁵ as can be seen in Master of Saint Bartholomew Altarpiece [Figure 11]. Additionally, depictions of the saint were not prevalent until after *Lady Playing a Lute* was most likely created.

While lutes were included in art to indicate the portrayal of holy women, they also represented sensuality. This symbolism was common in allegorical settings of the prodigal son, in which the wayward protagonist is accompanied by prostitutes, music, gambling, and alcohol. The lute and flute are often paired together to represent sexuality. "Their instruments, flute and lute, must be understood in their licentious significance as symbols of the male and female sexual organs."¹⁰⁶ The sexual indications of the lute are also enhanced by courtesans' use of them. "Most representations of courtesan musicians, particularly paintings of courtesans playing the lute, imply a private space, while also suggesting a hidden clientele."¹⁰⁷ It is clear that the woman in *Lady Playing a Lute* is neither a prostitute in the company of the prodigal son or a view of one of their disheveled high-class counterparts, a courtesan, but these representations of the lute would have been familiar with the audience who may have drawn connections between Bartolomeo's painting and the sexual imagery referenced.

COURTESANS

Aside from a lute, there were a number of ways a courtesan would be represented. One of the most commonly used visual cues for the depictions of courtesans is a tilted head.¹⁰⁸ Time and again, courtesans are seen distracting someone with their music performance while gazing directly at the viewer with a tilted head.¹⁰⁹ While the woman in *Music Lesson* is viewing the music, her head is positioned in this manner, as is the subject in *Lady Playing a Lute*. The wardrobes of the characters also help in their

¹⁰⁵ Albert Ausoni, *Music in Art*, p. 148

¹⁰⁶ H. Colin Slim, "The Prodigal Son at the Whores' Music, Art, and Drama," p. 18

¹⁰⁷ Drew Edward Davies, "On Music Fit for a Courtesan: Representations of the Courtesan and Her Music in Sixteenth-Century Italy," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 154

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 144

¹⁰⁹ Drew Edward Davies, "On Music Fit for a Courtesan," p. 144

identification. The headdresses in *Music Lesson* reinforces the idea that the woman is a courtesan and suggest that the oldest man on the bottom right is a priest.¹¹⁰

For modern standards, it may seem contradictory for a priest and courtesan to be in the same space; yet, it was not uncommon for men of the church and women of pleasure to be in one another's company. Courtesans made a point of regularly attending church, since it was a convenient method of publicity,¹¹¹ and priests would sometimes live with their concubines.¹¹² Courtesans were in fact introduced to high society by a pope,¹¹³ and from then on, the men of the ecclesiastical body were some of the most prevalent customers of courtesans.¹¹⁴ These relationships were so common that children of popes were openly identified and placed in powerful positions, such as Pope Alexander VI's many recognized children.

Not surprisingly, courtesans' lives reflected their patrons' decadent and luxurious lifestyle. More often rewarded in gifts than monetary payments,¹¹⁵ particularly successful courtesans were given private palazzos, which they furnished with servants and bodyguards.¹¹⁶ They also had the ability to create legally binding contracts and wills. Their relative legal freedom allowed them a level of independence uncommon to women of this era.¹¹⁷ This independence, however, meant they occupied a liminal space within Renaissance culture.¹¹⁸ While their wealth rivaled any elite and well-connected woman, the manner in which they earned their income separated them from the upper class. They were not regarded as common prostitutes, but not much distinguished a courtesan in the courts from a woman in a brothel.¹¹⁹ "What separated a prostitute from a courtesan was money and they would flaunt it in the form of exotic

¹¹⁰ H. Colin Slim, "Two Paintings of 'Concert Scenes'," p. 171

¹¹¹ Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*, p. 28

¹¹² Ibid, p. 15

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 5

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ Drew Edward Davies, "On Music Fit for a Courtesan," p. 146

¹¹⁶ Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*, p. 17, 24

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 10

¹¹⁸ Drew Edward Davies, "On Music Fit for a Courtesan," p. 144

¹¹⁹ Drew Edward Davies, "On Music Fit for a Courtesan," p. 150

animals, jewels, etc.”¹²⁰ Courtesans wore the most fashionable clothing and most expensive jewels to visibly flaunt their place in high society.¹²¹ They often imported animals and clothing to European courts, influencing fashion with their exotic sense of taste.¹²² They were so dedicated to fashion that some courtesans employed women, by the title of *ruffiana*, to ensure they were wearing the most fashionable clothing and hairstyles.¹²³ In a world where wealthy and powerful Florentines wore simple and unassuming dark clothing, these women’s extravagance must have been a distinguishing feature of their profession.

Artists would often use the courtesans’ exquisite wardrobe to signify their subjects’ profession. This can be seen in Sebastiano Florigerio’s *Music Lesson*. The younger woman’s headdress and outfit refer to an exotic sense of style,¹²⁴ and her bodice is lined with jewels. This decadence, in addition to the presence of the priest, strengthens the theory that the character is a courtesan. While the fashion marks the woman in Florigerio’s painting as a courtesan, compared to the woman in *Music Lesson*, the wardrobe of the lute-playing woman in



FIGURE 12: SEBASTIANO FLORIGERIO *MUSIC LESSON* 1525 ALTE PINAKOTHEK, MUNICH

Bartolomeo Veneto’s piece seems almost bland. She is dressed more modestly, but the jewels around her bodice suggest a wealthy lifestyle, as does the ermine draped over her arm, which was worn by wealthy women to keep fleas away.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*, p. 6

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 9

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ Jane Hatter, “Col tempo: musical time, aging, and sexuality”

¹²⁵ H. Colin Slim, “Multiple Images of Bartolommeo Veneto’s Lute-Playing Woman,” p. 417

Judging from clothing alone, it is difficult to say if Bartolomeo's subject is a courtesan or a wealthy woman.

MUSIC MANUSCRIPTS

In a time where the papacy and Roman states were one of the most formidable global forces, successful courtesans were called upon to entertain their patrons and visiting dignitaries.¹²⁶ They offered more than mere beauty and physical pleasure, however. To succeed in their craft, a courtesan needed to have enough education to carry on intelligent conversations with their clients and their clients' acquaintances.¹²⁷

In fact the courtesan's art of pleasing was not limited to the sexual act, though the Renaissance saw nothing wrong in enjoying sexual pleasure to the full - in this neo-pagan world physical beauty was regarded as divine, and sensuality came not far behind. Moreover, many of the courtesans were highly accomplished, particularly in music, and two at least were respectable poets. They also entertained lavishly, and for their charm, their taste in dress, their spirited and witty conversation, they themselves were much sought-after guests at parties, especially in Rome where the papal curia attracted innumerable young men with literary aspirations.¹²⁸

Trained from a young age to have the skills needed to entertain clients,¹²⁹ courtesans flaunted their education. Many courtesans made a point of leaving poetry out for their patrons to see, and many depictions of courtesans conspicuously display books of poetry.¹³⁰ One such artwork, attributed to Domenico Puligo, shows Petrarchan poetry on a table beside the woman.¹³¹ Some courtesans did not simply read poetry but composed sonnets and madrigals as well. Machiavelli and his mistress were even known to write madrigals together that were sung between acts of a play.¹³² In addition to poetry, many courtesans would practice music and keep instruments and manuscripts visible in their rooms. One of the most well-known women in the profession, Imperia, always had an instrument on display in her room.¹³³ If the woman in *Music Lesson* truly is a courtesan, her silence is intriguing. A respectable courtesan was

¹²⁶ Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*, p. 5

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 3

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 31, 38

¹³¹ Drew Edward Davies, "On Music Fit for a Courtesan," p. 146

¹³² Ibid, p. 146

¹³³ Georgina Masson, *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*

educated in music, meaning Florigerio's subject would have been feigning ignorance if she was indeed a courtesan.

While these women of pleasure were trained in poetry and music, their knowledge was simple compared to men and their female aristocratic counterparts. They are often depicted performing light and simple homophonic music that could be adapted for solo performance or for single instrumental accompaniment.¹³⁴ One such genre was the titled aria, which provided a framework of music and allowed the women to overlay poetry of their choice during performances.¹³⁵ Another genre used by courtesans was the frottola. Most prevalent in northern Italy, the frottola was one of the precursors to the madrigal and encompassed many various genres of light and comical music. In the early stages of its popularity, it was composed primarily as a solo piece¹³⁶ and provided a bare framework for the performer to improvise around.¹³⁷ Its simple and malleable structure made the frottola a prime choice for courtesans.

This music also aligned with the focus of the humanist movement, in that the frottola conveyed both poetry and emotion while highlighting the individual.¹³⁸ The humanists' high regard for musical settings of poetry aided in the creation of this new genre of secular music. Italian polyphonic music began in the fourteenth century but seems to have disappeared in 1420. It was not until 1490 that Italian polyphony returned. Composed primarily as solo pieces performers could improvise around, the frottola had simple beginnings. This type of music was unique in that it was considered a rustic form but was also popular in the courts. Frottola development was centered in Mantua under the patronage of Isabella d'Este. After the 1520s, frottolas became more complex, and the division between the frottola and madrigal becomes difficult to define. In frottolas, the lines of music and lines of poetry end simultaneously. Madrigals, however, were more continuous, with musical lines continuing past the lines of text. As humanists spent more time studying Petrarch, the setting of his poetry was a key differentiating factor between frottolas and madrigals. Frottolas were also crucial to the development of

¹³⁴ Drew Edward Davies, "On Music Fit for a Courtesan," p. 148

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 148

¹³⁶ Allan W. Atlas, *Renaissance Music: Music in western Europe*, p. 353

¹³⁷ Howard Brown, Louise K. Stein, *Music in the Renaissance*, p. 94

¹³⁸ Allan W. Atlas, *Renaissance Music: Music in western Europe*, p. 353

music's interaction with business. These were some of the first musical works to be printed and so represent the first combination of music and business.

As the sixteenth century continued, this genre reached the height of its popularity and was distributed across Europe. It is not surprising that both *Music Lesson* and *Lady Playing a Lute* contain this genre of music. While faithfulness to the music can often help scholars identify copies of paintings from the originals, it offers little help in *Lady Playing a Lute*.

Something by virtue of their various stages of musical accuracy, variants of the same composition inscribed in different copies of the same artwork help establish which copy was presumably closest to the original. If no original can be established, it may be shown what a putative original might have been, and which piece or pieces of music might prove most reliable towards establishing a stemma of paintings having the same image. The 24 replicas of Bartolomeo Veneto's *Lady Playing a Lute* (1520), which contain 5 different pieces of music, demonstrate almost all of the above points.¹³⁹

The music in every duplicate of *Lady Playing a Lute* differs from all the others. Despite the errors, five pieces have been identified which may have been the inspiration for the artist.¹⁴⁰ The music in this artwork appears to be a piece for three voices without text. Based on the stem and bassus notation on the score, Slim dates this piece as 1480-1520,¹⁴¹ which would fit within the timeframe of the artwork. The tune in the manuscript is simple and easily played on the lute.¹⁴²

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the partbook in *Lady Playing a Lute* is not the music it contains, but its position. Instead of facing the performer, the music is legible only to the viewer. This may simply be a lack of musical understanding by the artist, or it could be a purposeful decision. Given the woman's direct and inviting gaze, this position of the music can be seen to draw the viewer in, almost as if the woman is inviting us to participate with her. "The frottola provided them [northern Italian aristocrats] with music to which they could do more than just listen: especially when performed as a piece for solo voice with lute accompaniment, this song form invited participation by well-bred amateurs."¹⁴³

¹³⁹ H. Colin Slim, "Introduction: Some Thoughts on Musical Inscriptions," p. 5

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 3

¹⁴¹ H. Colin Slim, "Multiple Images of Bartolommeo Veneto's Lute-Playing Woman," p. 414

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 414

¹⁴³ Allan W. Atlas, *Renaissance Music: Music in western Europe*, p. 350

Bartolomeo Veneto may have used the inherent participatory nature of the frottola to enhance the suggestively welcoming nature of the woman in the painting.

Fortunately for historians, Florigerio is extremely diligent in his painting of the music in *Music Lesson*, allowing for more study on the music manuscript. The music book in this piece has been identified as one of the partbooks from Andrea Antico's *Motteti e canzone libro primo*,¹⁴⁴ which was a collection of frottolas and madrigals that could be performed by a varying number of participants. On one of the pages of the manuscript is Michele Pesenti's *Alma gentil*. Michele Pesenti was a priest and rector of the church in Verona after 1525 who also moonlighted as a music composer.¹⁴⁵ When Sebastiano Florigerio painted *Music Lesson*, Pesenti would have been near fifty years old, which makes him a similar age to the priest in the painting.¹⁴⁶ H. Colin Slim suggests this is a portrait of the composer surrounded by his family. The sexual implications throughout the piece, however, seem to point to a group other than a family.¹⁴⁷ Regardless of the common practice for holy men and courtesans to interact, it would not have likely been portrayed in a family painting. Nonetheless, it is possible, and even probable that the priest in *Music Lesson* is the composer of *Alma gentil*, even if the other characters are not members of his family.

The poem Pesenti set to music was used by various composers of the time and would have been well known. The text is clearly that of a madrigal, but the inner voices provide only simple harmonies, whereas the inner voices of madrigals created complex polyphony.¹⁴⁸ Because of its common text and simple construction, Pesenti's *Alma gentil* would have been a likely choice for a courtesan due to its simplicity and supports the theory that this woman is a representation of a courtesan.

¹⁴⁴ H. Jane Hatter, "Col tempo: musical time, aging, and sexuality"

¹⁴⁵ H. Colin Slim, "Two Paintings of 'Concert Scenes'", p. 171

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 173

¹⁴⁷ Bert Meijer, "Harmony and Satire in the Works of Niccolò Frangipane," p. 110

¹⁴⁸ H. Colin Slim, "Two Paintings of 'Concert Scenes'," p. 168

The fact that Florigerio only paints one altus partbook into the scene is worth investigating, since the book displayed in the painting would have been accompanied by three others containing the remaining vocal parts. If this scene is indeed a concert as the grouping of figures may suggest, it is odd that four individuals are all reading from one part without the others. If this scene is not a concert, it is possible that it is instead depicting a music lesson, as the title would suggest.

TACTUS

In the sixteenth century, every member of an ensemble visually performed the tempo by raising and lowering their index finger. This finger-tapping was then referred to as the *tactus*. In everyday practice, the *tactus* was used to ensure the cohesion of an ensemble through the signaling of a steady musical tempo. In music lessons, teachers would stand near their pupils, usually young boys, and physically tap the tempo on their shoulders.¹⁴⁹ This pedagogical practice can be seen in a number of artistic works such as Lucca della Robbia's sculptures for the cantoria at Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence [Figure 13]. Visually, all members were able to see the tempo while also actively participating in the setting of time. While this can be viewed as an innocent didactic tool, it can mature into a sexually-charged gesture in other situations. Courtesans were associated with music lessons, but they were usually the teachers.¹⁵⁰ An interaction with a patron could begin with a music lesson, which would provide men with a reason to call upon the lady. Yet, it can be assumed in this setting that the woman is not the teacher because she is not visibly marking the tempo. In fact, she is hiding her marking of the *tactus* under the book.¹⁵¹ If the role of teacher moved from courtesan to client, then the woman is feigning ignorance, possibly as a way to get close to these men and can even be seen as a sign of sensuality.

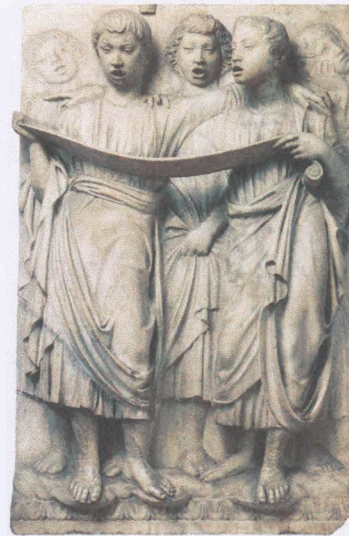


FIGURE 13: LUCCA DELLA ROBBIA
CANTORIA 1431-1438
MUSEO DELL'OPERA DEL
DUOMO, FLORENCE

¹⁴⁹ Jane Hatter, "Col tempo: musical time, aging, and sexuality"

¹⁵⁰ Drew Edward Davies, "On Music Fit for a Courtesan," p. 145

¹⁵¹ Jane Hatter, "Col tempo: musical time, aging, and sexuality"

Renaissance artists used the *tactus* as a way to indicate the passing of time in an individual's life and to signify the age of an individual.¹⁵² Hatter argues, "in paintings from northern Italy the physical performance of a *tactus* as a symbol for time communicated a range of allegorical associations with the human body, aging, and sexuality that were intelligible to a musically informed public during the first decades of the sixteenth century."¹⁵³ The physicality of this motion was used to imply sensuality. This can be seen in Florigerio's *Music Lesson*. Here, the three men in the foreground actively participate in the performance of the *tactus*, using this as a way to gain physical proximity to the woman. One has his arm draped across the woman's back and is marking the *tactus* on her bare shoulder. The eldest gentleman on the right is indicating the *tactus* over the manuscript she is holding, and the extension of his arm puts him at a place of relative intimacy with the woman as their wrists meet and pulses combine.¹⁵⁴ Although the title *Music Lesson* indicates an educational scene, it takes on sensual undertones as the *tactus* allows the men to initiate physical contact with the woman, further suggesting she is a courtesan.



FIGURE 14: SEBASTIANO FLORIGERIO *MUSIC LESSON* 1525 ALTE PINAKOTHEK, MUNICH

¹⁵² Jane Hatter, "Col tempo: musical time, aging, and sexuality"

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

CONCLUSION

While it is almost undisputed that the woman in Sebastiano Florigerio's *Music Lesson* is a courtesan, or that there are sexual undertones implicit in the work at the very least, the status of the woman in Bartolomeo Veneto's *Lady Playing a Lute* is less clear. Both the tilt of her head and the jeweled neckline of her dress suggest that she is a courtesan. The open part-book and welcoming gaze of the woman can also be seen as indications of a sexual invitation. There are, however, many aspects that may indicate a virtuous woman instead. The lute does have sexual connotations, but it also is associated with Mary Magdalene, so there is little help there. The fact that halos were painted on fourteen of twenty-three replicas of this work¹⁵⁵ may suggest she is intended to be Saint Cecilia, but that proves anachronistic upon further investigation. Additionally, her elegant and bejeweled clothing may be a way of simply showing the high class of the subject. For all these reasons, many scholars disagree on the character of Florigerio's subject.

Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840-1924) preceded these debates between art historians. As an avid art collector, she accumulated masterpieces and created a museum to house them, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. She gave the creation of her museum much thought and care. Each piece was so thoughtfully placed, that her will states nothing may change in the museum. While unfortunately this means stolen pieces are now represented only by their empty frames, it can also provide insight into Isabella's view of the artwork. *Lady Playing a Lute*, called *A Woman with a Lute* in her museum, is part of her collection and is included in the Titian Room. The preceding room is a dark, somber space filled with images of the virgin and child, portraits of virtuous women, and other sacred objects. In striking contrast, the Titian Room holds gilded furniture, sensuous paintings of Greek mythology, rich drapery, and is brightly lit. Placing *Lady Playing a Lute* in this room of sensuous and earthly objects suggests that this ardent and well-educated art collector may have associated Bartolomeo Veneto's work with the earthly and sensuous aspects of life instead of the sacred.

¹⁵⁵ H. Colin Slim, "Multiple Images of Bartolommeo Veneto's Lute-Playing Woman," p. 418

It is unlikely that Isabella Stewart Gardner made this decision based on a conscious opinion of the sitter, and it is even more unlikely that we will ever know how both artists wanted their works perceived. During this time, art was viewed as a portion of a larger piece, such as a room or multiple pieces. Without knowing the original placement of these paintings, one cannot know for certain what the patron and artist envisioned for these works. The symbols in both paintings have precedents that indicate the women's sensuality, while other aspects are vague in their sexual connotations. Despite these inconsistencies, there seems to be more evidence supporting the depiction of a courtesan in both. These cultural, symbolic, and musical practices display women's fragile place in music and society of the Renaissance. Drawing upon musical practices, artistic developments, fashion trends, and societal norms, Sebastiano Florigerio and Bartolomeo Veneto display how female music-making was perceived and offer modern viewers a glimpse into the complexity of Renaissance culture.

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PAINTED FACES & PRINTED MUSIC:
WOMEN AND MUSIC IN THE PAINTINGS OF BARTOLOMEO VENETO &
SEBASTIANO FLORIGERIO

By

Lauren N. Rosenblatt

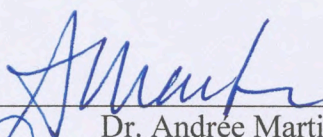
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Honors in the Degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS
MUSIC
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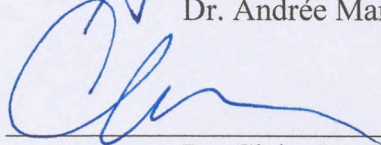
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Dr. Andrée Martin

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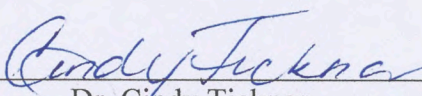
Thesis Advisor


Dr. Claire McCoy

Date

4/17/17

Honors College Dean


Dr. Cindy Ticknor

Date

4/17/17

